

**ANN BROWN
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U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
REMARKS AT
KABOOM PLAYGROUND INSTITUTE
OAK BROOK, ILLINOIS
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I ONCE READ A STORY ABOUT THE TIME GEORGE
BERNARD SHAW SENT WINSTON CHURCHILL TWO
TICKETS AND A NOTE THAT READ:

"ENCLOSED ARE TWO TICKETS TO THE FIRST-
NIGHT PERFORMANCE OF MY NEW PLAY.

BRING A FRIEND -- IF YOU HAVE ONE."

CHURCHILL SENT A NOTE BACK:

"DEAR GBS: UNFORTUNATELY I AM ENGAGED ON
THAT NIGHT.

COULD I HAVE TICKETS FOR THE SECOND NIGHT --
IF THERE IS ONE?"

THIS IS MY FIRST PERFORMANCE HERE – AND I AM
HONORED THAT YOU INVITED ME TO SPEAK TO YOU.

I AM A FAN OF KABOOM – AND I AM A FAN OF
DARRELL HAMMOND’S.

DARRELL AND KABOOM HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO
KEEP THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA PLAYING ON SAFE
PLAYGROUNDS.

DARRELL CAME TO CPSC EARLY ON TO FIND OUT
HOW TO ENSURE SAFETY ON THE PLAYGROUNDS
KABOOM BUILT.

AND HE MADE SAFETY A PART OF KABOOM’S
COMMITMENT.

DARRELL, THAT WAS A WONDERFUL SERVICE TO
THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA.

WE ARE ALL HERE BECAUSE WE CARE ABOUT
SAFETY -- AND ESPECIALLY BECAUSE WE WANT TO
KEEP KIDS FROM GETTING HURT.

NONE OF US HOPES TO BANISH THE BRUISES AND
SCRAPES THAT ARE CHILDREN'S BADGES OF HONOR.

OUR GOAL IS TO PREVENT THE SERIOUS INJURIES;
TO KEEP KIDS OUT ON THE PLAYGROUND -- AND NOT
INSIDE THE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS.

IT IS THE SAME DESIRE THAT LED ME TO TAKE THE
JOB AS CHAIRMAN OF THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT
SAFETY COMMISSION.

AT CPSC OUR MISSION IS TO SAVE LIVES AND
REDUCE INJURIES TO AMERICAN FAMILIES.

AMERICANS MAY BE CYNICAL ABOUT
GOVERNMENT.

BUT THEY ARE NOT CYNICAL ABOUT SAFETY.

IN A 1999 HARRIS POLL ABOUT FEDERAL SAFETY REGULATIONS, WHEN ASKED ABOUT STRICT RULES ABOUT PRODUCT SAFETY, FOOD, AIRLINES AND HIGHWAY SAFETY, 93% RATED FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT AS "IMPORTANT."

WE KNOW OUR WORK IS IMPORTANT -- AND WE KNOW THERE'S A LOT MORE TO ACCOMPLISH.

CPSC OVERSEES ABOUT 15,000 TYPES OF PRODUCTS THAT ADD PLEASURE TO LIFE FOR MOST BUT CAN POSE DANGER TO SOME.

IN FACT, EACH YEAR THERE ARE OVER 29 MILLION INJURIES -- AND ABOUT 22,000 DEATHS RELATED TO THOSE PRODUCTS.

THERE IS A SOLID DIFFERENCE SINCE WE CAME TO CPSC IN 1994.

YOU CAN SEE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN IT
COMES TO THE CIVIL PENALTIES WE ASSESS FOR
VIOLATING OUR LAWS.

IN 1999 WE ASSESSED MORE THAN TEN TIMES
THE AMOUNT OF PENALTIES THAT WERE
ASSESSED IN 1989.

WE'VE IMPROVED OUR TOLL-FREE HOTLINE.
WHEN I CAME THERE WERE EIGHT LINES. NOW WE
HAVE 96.

A RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT USED TO TAKE
AS MUCH AS 48 DAYS. NOW IT TAKES 48 HOURS.

ANOTHER DIFFERENCE? THE NUMBER OF
RECALLS.

IN 1987, THE CPSC ISSUED 136 RECALLS.

IN THE YEAR AFTER I TOOK OVER, WE DID
MORE THAN THREE TIMES AS MANY – FOUR
HUNDRED AND FORTY.

AND WE DO THE RECALLS DIFFERENTLY.

OUR PREDECESSORS USED TO DO WHAT I
CALL THE PAPER AIRPLANE APPROACH -- SAIL A
LITTLE PRESS RELEASE OUT THE WINDOW HOPING
IT HITS SOMEONE ON THE HEAD BELOW.

THEY HAD ONE FAX LINE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

WE DO OUR BEST TO GET ATTENTION FOR
OUR RECALLS -- ON TV, RADIO, FEATURES IN
NEWSPAPERS.

OTHER AGENCIES DREAD IT WHEN THEY
HEAR REPORTERS WANT TO DO A STORY ON THEM.

WE LOVE IT. WE ADMIRE WHAT THE
MORNING SHOWS HAVE DONE FOR CONSUMERS.

IN FACT, THE ONE QUESTION I AM ASKED
MORE THAN ANY OTHER -- WHAT'S KATIE
COURIC REALLY LIKE?

BY THE WAY THAT REMINDS ME
(RADER DOLL STORIES) --

1. BABY HAD LEAD IN HER HEAD – WHEN WENT THROUGH X-RAY, THOUGHT IT WAS A BOMB AND HAD TO CALL THE BOMB SQUAD TO CHECK.
2. BABY IN OVERHEAD LUGGAGE RACK.
3. BABY STRAPPED IN, WITH WINGS PINNED ON.
4. NBC CAMERAMAN – FORGOT YOUR BABY.

AS CHAIRMAN OF CPSC, ONE OF MY TOP PRIORITIES HAS BEEN TO REDUCE INJURIES IN SPORTS AND RECREATION – AND PLAYGROUNDS ARE HIGH ON MY LIST OF SAFETY CONCERNS.

(pause)

PLAYGROUNDS ARE A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF THE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE.

THEY SHOULD BE SAFE HAVENS FOR CHILDREN.

WE ALL HAVE MEMORIES OF PLAYING AT
PLAYGROUNDS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD PARK AND AT
RECESS IN THE SCHOOLYARD.

I STILL HAVE SCARS ON MY KNEES FROM FALLING
DOWN ON THE CINDER SURFACE OF MY CHILDHOOD
PLAYGROUND.

WE SPENT TIME WITH OUR FRIENDS AND OUR
SIBLINGS AT THE PLAYGROUND, LEARNING TO FACE
LIFE'S CHALLENGES.

(PAUSE)

THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY
COMMISSION HAS BEEN WORKING TO MAKE
PLAYGROUNDS SAFE FOR KIDS SINCE THE AGENCY
OPENED ITS DOORS IN 1973.

CPSC CREATED PLAYGROUND SAFETY GUIDELINES
AS A DETAILED WORKING BLUEPRINT TO HELP LOCAL
COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS BUILD AND MAINTAIN
SAFE PLAYGROUNDS.

THREE YEARS AGO, WE ISSUED UPDATED GUIDELINES IN THE REVISED "HANDBOOK FOR PUBLIC PLAYGROUND SAFETY".

THESE GUIDELINES ARE USED BY STATES AND CITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO ENSURE THE PLAYGROUNDS THEY BUILD ARE SAFE.

THREE STATES – CALIFORNIA, MICHIGAN AND TEXAS – HAVE INCORPORATED REQUIREMENTS FROM THE CPSC HANDBOOK FOR PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS INTO STATE LAW.

AND THE MAYOR OF PITTSBURGH, TOM MURPHY, GOT INTERESTED IN MAKING EVERY PLAYGROUND IN HIS CITY SAFE.

HE MADE IT ONE OF HIS PRIORITIES – AND HE BACKED HIS COMMITMENT WITH THE FUNDS TO RENOVATE OR REPAIR EVERY SINGLE PLAYGROUND IN THE CITY.

I WAS SO IMPRESSED WHEN I HEARD THAT THAT I
AWARDED HIM THE CPSC CHAIRMAN'S
COMMENDATION – AN AWARD I GIVE FOR
EXTRAORDINARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO SAFETY IN
AREAS THAT I THINK ARE IMPORTANT.

I LOVED WHAT THE PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE
SAID ABOUT THE MAYOR'S PLAN IN AN EDITORIAL –
“PROVIDING SUCH FACILITIES IS AN IMPORTANT
LEGACY FOR ANY CITY TO LEAVE TO FUTURE
GENERATIONS.”

WE HAVE MADE GREAT STRIDES BUT, SADLY, WE
HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO.

IN 1999, 240,000 PEOPLE REQUIRED EMERGENCY
ROOM TREATMENT FOR PLAYGROUND INJURIES.

OVER ONE-QUARTER OF THE INJURIES WERE TO
CHILDREN UNDER 5.

AND, TRAGICALLY, EACH YEAR, THERE ARE, ON AVERAGE, ABOUT 17 DEATHS A YEAR INVOLVING PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT.

PLAYGROUND INJURIES ARE PREVENTABLE INJURIES.

AND EVERY ONE THAT CAN BE PREVENTED SHOULD BE PREVENTED.

MOST OF THE INJURIES TO CHILDREN DON'T COME FROM THE EQUIPMENT.

THREE-QUARTERS OF THE INCIDENTS OCCUR AS THE RESULT OF FALLS FROM THE EQUIPMENT.

SO WE HAVE TO PARTICULARLY MAKE SURE THAT THE SURFACING IS SAFE.

CPSC PROMOTES GUIDELINES FOR PLAYGROUND SURFACING TO PREVENT SERIOUS HEAD INJURY AND DEATH TO CHILDREN.

WE HAVE PUSHED FOR REMOVAL OF MACADAM
AND CONCRETE SURFACES – LIKE THE ONES THAT
USED TO BE SO COMMON.

CPSC HAS ALSO PROMOTED SAFETY ZONES
BETWEEN PLAY EQUIPMENT, SO THAT CHILDREN HAVE
ENOUGH SPACE TO PLAY SAFELY.

BECAUSE OF OUR EFFORTS AND COLLABORATIVE
EFFORTS WITH OTHERS, THERE HAS BEEN A DRAMATIC
IMPROVEMENT IN WHAT WE SEE ON PLAYGROUNDS
TODAY.

THE DAYS OF MONKEY BARS OVER ASPHALT ARE
RAPIDLY BECOMING A THING OF THE PAST.

BUT MOST PEOPLE STILL DON'T KNOW THAT NOT
ALL PLAYGROUND SURFACING IS SAFE.

I LIKE TO TRY OUT A LITTLE QUIZ WHENEVER I DO
A TV INTERVIEW -- I'LL ASK THE INTERVIEWER IF
GRASS IS A SAFE SURFACE FOR A PLAYGROUND.

THEY ALMOST ALWAYS SAY YES.

BUT THE FACT IS -- AS I AM SURE YOU KNOW --
GRASS IS NOT A SAFE SURFACE.

IT DOES NOT CUSHION FALLS WELL.

EVEN WHEN IT IS NEW AND THICK, GRASS IS NOT
RESILIENT.

AND ON PLAYGROUNDS IT QUICKLY BECOMES
PACKED HARD EARTH.

SURFACES THAT DO PROVIDE CUSHIONING FROM
FALLS INCLUDE AT LEAST 12 INCHES OF WOOD CHIPS,
MULCH, SAND OR PEA GRAVEL. ALSO GOOD ARE MATS
MADE OF SAFETY-TESTED RUBBER OR RUBBER-LIKE
MATERIALS.

AND THE SURFACING MUST BE PROPERLY
MAINTAINED.

LACK OF MAINTENANCE LEADS TO INJURY --
EVEN WHEN THE SURFACING WAS SAFE IN THE FIRST
PLACE.

WE AT CPSC DO OTHER THINGS TO BE SURE
PLAYGROUNDS ARE SAFE.

WE RECALL PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT THAT
PRESENTS A HAZARD.

SOMETIMES WE HEAR ABOUT THE PROBLEMS
FIRST FROM PEOPLE ON THE FRONT LINES.

A FEW YEARS AGO A PARK SUPERINTENDENT IN
BRIARCLIFF, NEW YORK, ALERTED US TO A PROBLEM
WITH A BEAM ON A SWING SET.

HE REPORTED TO CPSC THAT A BEAM THAT HELD
THE SWINGS A FATHER AND SON WERE SITTING ON
HAD FALLEN.

THE ALUMINUM CLAMP THAT HELD THE BEAM IN
PLACE HAD CRACKED.

LUCKILY, THE BEAM DID NOT HIT EITHER THE
FATHER OR SON.

BUT CPSC ESTABLISHED THAT THE ALUMINUM
CLAMPS THE COMPANY USED WERE FAILING.

IN AN AGREEMENT WITH CPSC, THE COMPANY
RECALLED AND REPLACED THE CLAMPS ON 11,000
PIECES OF EQUIPMENT.

THE REPORT FROM THAT ALERT PARK
SUPERINTENDENT HELPED PREVENT SERIOUS INJURIES
TO CHILDREN.

THAT KIND OF HELP IS INVALUABLE TO US IN OUR
WORK.

IF YOU EVER SEE PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT
THAT YOU SUSPECT ISN'T SAFE, BE SURE TO REPORT IT
TO US.

RECENTLY WE HAVE BECOME AWARE OF A NEW
AND RATHER UNEXPECTED HAZARD – CHILDREN'S
HEADS GETTING STUCK IN THE OPENINGS OF
PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT BECAUSE THEY ARE
WEARING BICYCLE HELMETS.

WE KNOW OF TWO CHILDREN WHO DIED THIS WAY
LAST YEAR – A THREE YEAR OLD PENNSYLVANIA BOY
WHOSE HEAD GOT WEDGED BETWEEN THE PLATFORMS
OF A PLAYGROUND AND A SIX YEAR OLD MISSOURI
BOY WHOSE HELMET BECAME ENTANGLED IN THE
ROPES OF A TRAPEZE.

WE HAVE ALSO HEARD OF FOUR OTHER NEAR
MISSES, WHERE A CHILD WEARING A HELMET GOT
CAUGHT, BUT WAS FORTUNATELY FREED IN TIME TO
AVERT DISASTER.

CPSC ENCOURAGES THE USE OF BICYCLE HELMETS
FOR BIKE RIDING. THEY SAVE LIVES.

BUT THOSE HELMETS ARE NOT SAFE ON
PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT.

KIDS AND THEIR PARENTS MUST LEARN THEY
SHOULD NEVER WEAR THE HELMETS WHEN THEY GO
TO THE PLAYGROUND.

LAST YEAR, WE DECIDED TO TAKE A LOOK AT CHILD-CARE CENTERS TO SEE HOW SAFE THEY WERE.

WE LOOKED AT EIGHT POTENTIAL HAZARDS IN CHILD-CARE SETTINGS, INCLUDING PLAYGROUND SURFACING AND PLAYGROUND SURFACE MAINTENANCE.

FOR CHILDREN UNDER 6, PLAYGROUND-RELATED INJURIES ACCOUNT FOR MORE VISITS TO U.S. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS THAN ANY OTHER CHILD CARE-RELATED INJURY.

WE KNOW OF THREE CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIED ON PLAYGROUNDS AT CHILD CARE SETTINGS FROM 1990 TO 1999.

WE FOUND THAT ABOUT A QUARTER OF THE CHILD-CARE PLAYGROUNDS WE CHECKED HAD UNSAFE SURFACING – AND EVEN MORE HAD POOR MAINTENANCE.

FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON JOINED US AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AT A CHILD-CARE CENTER IN WASHINGTON, DC, TO HELP US KICK OFF A CAMPAIGN TO TRY TO MAKE CHILD-CARE CENTERS SAFER.

CPSC ISSUED A REPORT AND A CHECKLIST THAT ENCOURAGED PARENTS AND CHILD-CARE PROVIDERS TO ELIMINATE HAZARDS IN THEIR CENTERS.

WE HAVE TRIED TO GET THIS SAFETY INFORMATION TO CHILD-CARE CENTERS.

I INVITE YOU TO HELP US SPREAD THE WORD.

TELL CHILD-CARE CENTERS EVERYWHERE YOU GO TO GET OUR CHECKLIST-- AND ACT ON IT.

(PAUSE)

YOU KNOW, THE WORK WE DO INVOLVES NOTHING LESS THAN PROTECTING THE LIVES OF THOSE MOST PRECIOUS TO US -- OUR FAMILIES.

AND BECAUSE I FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT THAT, I CAN'T CLOSE WITHOUT TELLING YOU ABOUT SOMETHING THAT HAS IMPRESSED ME MORE AND MORE OVER THE YEARS I'VE HELD THIS POSITION: HOW MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE MOST TERRIBLE PERSONAL TRAGEDIES, FIND MEANING IN HELPING OTHERS.

I KNOW THIS BECAUSE OVER THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN AT CPSC, I HAVE MADE A POINT OF TELEPHONING PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD IN AN INCIDENT INVOLVING A CONSUMER PRODUCT.

PICKING UP THE PHONE ISN'T EASY. I WORRY ABOUT INTRUDING ON THEIR PRIVATE GRIEF.

I'VE FOUND, THOUGH, THAT PARENTS ARE NOT ONLY RECEPTIVE, BUT HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO HELP SOLVE THE SAFETY PROBLEMS THAT CAUSED THEIR CHILD'S DEATH.

IF YOU EVER WONDER IF YOUR EFFORTS MATTER,
THINK ABOUT NANCY SIBLEY.

SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE MET THELMA SIBLEY,
NANCY'S MOTHER.

THELMA SUFFERED THE WORST NIGHTMARE OF
ANY PARENT.

HER FIVE YEAR OLD DAUGHTER, NANCY -- HER
ONLY CHILD -- STRANGLER WHEN THE DRAWSTRING
OF HER JACKET CAUGHT ON THE SPIRAL SLIDE AT HER
SCHOOL PLAYGROUND.

IT WASN'T THE FIRST SUCH INCIDENT -- SINCE 1985
THERE HAD BEEN 20 DEATHS FROM DRAWSTRINGS.

FOLLOWING NANCY'S DEATH, THELMA WANTED
TO DO SOMETHING TO ELIMINATE THE DRAWSTRING
HAZARD FOR CHILDREN.

SHE DID NOT WANT ANOTHER PARENT TO
EXPERIENCE WHAT SHE HAD GONE THROUGH.

BUT SHE WAS FRUSTRATED.

SHE TRIED TO WORK WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES
IN HER STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – BUT THEY
COULDN'T HELP HER.

SHE TRIED CONGRESS AND HAD NO LUCK.

THEN THELMA AND I FOUND EACH OTHER.

WE FORMED A PARTNERSHIP.

WE PRESENTED THE INDUSTRY WITH OUR
EVIDENCE.

IN FOUR MONTHS MANUFACTURERS
VOLUNTARILY AGREED TO REMOVE NECK AND HOOD
DRAWSTRINGS FROM MOST OF THE 20 MILLION
CHILDREN'S GARMENTS – AND REPLACE THEM WITH
OTHER FASTENERS LIKE SNAPS, HOOKS AND EYES OR
VELCRO.

TODAY, WHEN YOU WALK INTO A CHILDREN'S
CLOTHING STORE YOU'D BE HARD PRESSED TO FIND A
NECK DRAWSTRING ANYWHERE.

BUT THELMA DIDN'T STOP THERE.

LIKE YOU SHE HAS CONTINUED TO WORK TO
MAKE PLAYGROUNDS SAFER FOR ALL CHILDREN, IN
HER HOME STATE OF MICHIGAN AND AROUND THE
COUNTRY.

NOTHING CAN BRING NANCY BACK -- BUT THINK
OF ALL THOSE OTHER CHILDREN WHO WILL BE SAFER
BECAUSE OF THE EFFORTS OF PEOPLE LIKE THELMA --
AND PEOPLE LIKE YOU.

I COULD QUOTE YOU ALL THE STATISTICS YOU
WANT ABOUT LIVES THREATENED AND DOLLARS
SAVED IN THE AREA OF CONSUMER SAFETY.

BUT AS THE NOVELIST ARTHUR KOESTLER ONCE
WROTE: "STATISTICS DON'T BLEED."

NUMBERS DON'T TELL YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SEE
A LOVED ONE THREATENED.

THEY DON'T TELL YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE A
CHILD.

WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHOSE LITTLE SON OR
DAUGHTER OUR EFFORTS HAVE SAVED.

THAT'S ALWAYS THE CASE WITH SAFETY ISSUES.

YOU DON'T SEE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT THE
FATHER AND SON WHO WERE NOT HIT BY THE FALLING
BEAM OF A SWING...

OR ABOUT THE LITTLE GIRL WHO DID NOT DIE ON
A PLAYGROUND SLIDE...

BUT THEY ARE OUT THERE.

AND THE FACT IS, THEY ARE OUT THERE IN
INCREASING NUMBERS BECAUSE OF THE WORK WE DO.

IT MAY BE THE WATCHFULNESS OF A PARK
SUPERINTENDENT...

IT MAY BE THE COMMITMENT OF A KABOOM
VOLUNTEER...

IT MAY BE THE PLAYGROUND GUIDELINES OF THE
CPSC.

TOGETHER WE ARE ALL HELPING TO CREATE THAT
“LEGACY OF SAFETY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS ARE
THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ALL OF US, WORKING IN OUR
VARIOUS WAYS.

WORKING AS A TEAM.

CPSC’S ANNUAL BUDGET IS ONLY ENOUGH TO RUN
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR AN HOUR AND A
HALF.

BUT WE’RE DOING A LOT.

WE’VE DONE IT BY CREATING PARTNERSHIPS
WITH ORGANIZATIONS, WITH COMPANIES, WITH
CONSUMERS, WITH PARENTS.

WE’VE DONE IT BY GETTING RESULTS.

THE NEXT TIME I COME TO SPEAK TO YOU ... I'M
CONFIDENT WE'LL BE ABLE TO POINT TO MORE
EXAMPLES OF THE LIFESAVING THINGS WE HAVE DONE
IN THAT SAME SPIRIT.

FOR, UNLIKE A SHAW PLAY, WHEN IT COMES TO
SAFETY, THERE IS NO LAST ACT, THE CURTAIN NEVER
FALLS -- AND OUR WORK IS NEVER DONE.